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Research Article

Identity Crisis and Cultural Trauma in Manju Kapur's *Home*

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Abstract

People cannot forget their cultural identity because it always remains in their mind. So, when they make a plan to do new work or live in a new place, they cannot escape from their previous identity. Thus, this paper explores how the characters feel identity and cultural crisis in Manju Kapur's (2007) *Home*. When people go to different places and become associated with distinct cultures, they have the nostalgic feeling of their preceding behavior and place. Even the educated people have the trouble to escape from the traditional concept in new society because their conventional thoughts are deeply rooted in their mind. The past identity of them becomes the main obstacle to establish new concepts because they suffer from the long established behavior. The researcher has used Urvashi Butalia's notion of the conviction of identity and cultural crisis in the paper. Banwari Lal, Sona Gupta, and Nisha Gupta are distressed or disturbed because they have a fragmented mind in a new environment.

Keywords: Culture, gender, identity, psychology, trauma

Introduction

People cannot forget their previous cultural activities such as what kinds of activities they did, where they lived, how they behaved with different people and become unhappy in a new environment. It relates them with the historical incident and always invites painful situations in their lives. When they do not have any cultural identity, they become unsatisfied although they

are living comfortably. They intend to destroy the traditional concept by establishing a new thought, but suffer because they have a nostalgic feeling of previous cultural practices. Similarly, educated women do not accept patriarchal thought while doing any work. They always want to work freely but they cannot reject the role of men because women realize security under the power of men. They respect past gender discrimination and accept women's limitations because they cannot come out from patriarchal behavior. Therefore, men cannot become happy in advanced situations and educated women cannot become satisfied when they have promoted their economic condition because they realize identity and cultural crisis there.

Review of Literature

Different critics have studied Kapur's *Home* from the different perceptions. Uma Maheshwari (2015) has analyzed women's position in patriarchal society. She has concluded that Kapur judges "the position of women in a patriarchal society and deals with the problems of women (p. 255). Women face various problems in the patriarchal society and the young girls remain in dilemma because of "the traditional-versus-modern conflict" (p. 250). When they have a confusing situation, it brings conflict in the family. Although mothers and daughters belong to the same gender, the mothers desire "their daughters to be like them but the daughters want to learn from their experience" (p. 263). Old generation women easily accept patriarchal thought but new generation women lead them according to their experience. However, Shagulta Parween (2013) has studied the novel through the view of metaphysical dimension. She described that Kapur has mentioned "a theme, a concept, a trope, a metaphor, a symbol, and an idea saturated with metaphysical dimensions" (p. 143). She declares that the novelist has used the solid images of social status in the novel. The home represents women's psychological, emotional and social expectations and reflects "the images of confinement and of closed restrictive space" (p. 144). It portrays the emotional thoughts of women. Therefore, home is the image of women and the women can do the function being alive at their home.

V. Mahalakhmma (2015) has raised the issue of a new voice in a new social order. She explained that Indian women do not search for the freedom of their own selves but they desire the freedom of all Indian women. They raise a new voice as the new social order. Nisha Gupta only lives inside her home after her marriage. Her husband does not "share any personal or professional activity with her" (p. 146). He never desires to be aware of her wishes. Similarly,

Banwari Lal's family members have conventional and patriarchal thoughts and they think that "only men can work out of home, and women have to live inside of home" (p. 143). Family head, Banwari Lal desires to do something for the glory of all family members but Nisha ignores the patriarchal and male controlled family structure and she goes through a crowded place "where she is not accepted to play or to go out by her own choice" (p. 143). She moves everywhere of her own desire. However, Tridipkumar P. Macwan (2019) has highlighted the issue of impact of migration and modernity in human lives. People change their behavior, culture, and thoughts when they shift from rural to urban areas because of technological revolution and urbanization. She further described that migrated family members agree to receive the change which "influences individual thought, social behavior, and cultural perception" (p. 294). The impact of change directs the lives of them and then, they go ahead with the changing pattern of modern society and culture. Migration and desire bring socio-cultural change and youngsters fail to perform traditional behavior. The critic documented that Nisha stands up against the conventional tradition of arranged marriage because she wishes to "marry a boy from another caste" (p. 297). It creates a fraction between parents and children. Thus, both migration and modernity keep people in the conflict situation.

R. Jagtheeswari (2017) has explained that women have to struggle for utilizing the basic rights. She interpreted that Kapur has disclosed "the struggle of women is for the basic rights of women and it quests for the identity of them" (p. 90). The main purpose of women's struggle is to free all women from oppressive patriarchal symbolic order because women get a lot of physical, emotional and psychological suffering in the modern time. Therefore, in the beginning of the novel, women characters receive different mental tortures but they achieve certain freedom to a certain context. The critic further described that Nisha lives at her home silently showing honest feelings in the beginning, but she stands against the traditional patriarchal system later (p. 99). She does not like to spend her whole life at home but begins her personal business after her marriage. It is thought that women have to look after home, husband, children and to give them food that they have cooked by their hands in traditional society, but Nisha joins college "feeling adventure, daring and modern" (p. 99). She stands against the patriarchal thought and tries to establish her own identity after her marriage. Thus, Nisha develops an image of a new woman in the society. Similarly, O. S. Ravikumar (2021) has explained that Indian women have changed their lifestyle at the time because they get an opportunity of education, equal rights, and freedom

to choose for a long passage of time. Nisha becomes bold after her education. She challenges the traditional social norms and desires but she “follows the path which is not followed by any women of Banwari Lal’s family” (p. 240). She breaks the rules of her family because she desires to do all activities freely at any cost although the situation at her home is not favorable. She crosses the traditional boundaries using new ideas and becomes successful in her life. So, the younger generation women have taken the new way to survive their lives.

Departure

Different critics have analyzed Manju Kapur’s *Home* through different perspectives such as the position of women in the patriarchal society, new voice in new social order, and impact of migration, struggle for basic rights. They also have studied how women function in modern society. However, they have not analyzed how people suffer when they are living in developed areas, when they do not have financial problems, when they have an opportunity of taking proper education, and when they have personal freedom because they only remember their traditional socio-cultural behavior which they had practiced in their childhood. When they begin to practice new socio-cultural behavior, they always realize identity and cultural crises in their lives. So, this paper studies that people cannot become happy when they remember the past concept of life. Although they do not have any economic, social, and political problems, they get tortured in their lives because they only remember their past culture and social identity. Therefore, their lives become complicated because of cultural and gender issues.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology to explore identity crisis and cultural trauma. It selects Kapur’s *Home* as primary text. The research employs textual and thematic analysis to interpret identity crises. People think that they are a part of history and desire to continue their previous experiences in their lives because they have nostalgic feelings of the past memory where they lived, what kinds of culture they performed in the family, which activities they worked there, and how the family was handled. The study is guided by a theoretical framework of Urvashi Butalia’s the convection of identity and cultural trauma and centers the reconstruction and recuperation of the earlier experience which makes them unhappy

in their lives. Data are analyzed interpretively to identify recurring motifs. This approach enables in-depth understanding of how they have problems when they are in different cultures.

Textual Analysis

When people migrate to a new place, they cannot be happy there because they only remember the past events of their motherland and have a fragmented mind because of their nostalgic feeling. They always remain in a dilemma because they cannot adjust with the new culture. Then, they think about the past life and wish for the same previous environment throughout their lives. They feel uneasy when there is a slight change in the environment. Butalia (1998) has explained that people are in a dilemma; utilizing modern facilities in new places and having problems with memory of past history. They migrate to well developed cities but they remember village area experiences. The past experiences of their motherland make them unhappy in the developed area (p. 318). People regularly remember childhood experiences and become unhappy although they do not have any financial and social problems in their present life. Banwari Lal does not seem happy when he comes to Delhi from Pakistan although he can use different facilities there. He becomes anxious with his current life, as Kapur (2007) has described that it happens in the story of him when he goes to the past at the age of seventy. He is now approaching seventy but he always remembers his family how they were staying and what position they had in the antecedent time. They had their own lifestyle in Pakistan. He always remembers his childhood experience in his mind. Then, he does not desire to spend the present and future days in Delhi but he has to spend the days there (pp. 75-76). He is seventy years old but he does not seem happy with the present life because he only remembers his childhood experience of Pakistan. He comes to the new place, starts the new business, and spends a luxurious life but he cannot remove the childhood experience from his mind. So, he always feels that he has an identity problem in Delhi. His concern is to maintain family reputation and not to lose the traditional property and cultural identity. He does not easily accept the changing role of women, romantic relationships, and individual freedom. He becomes disgusted when he sees losing family honor and strict control over family members. Thus, Banwari Lal has the culturally traumatic feeling which gives pain in the new place because he cannot forget precursory experiences.

Even educated people have the problem that their old concept in new society. They tend to establish a new credence in a new society by destroying traditional belief but they cannot bear

the situation. They always desire to follow the previous behaviors, as Yatinkumar J. Teraya (2000) argued that every individual desires to maintain their past identity at their home and in the society and most of the problems are related with their home and earlier environment where they lived. He has further assured that Manju Kapur has clarified different layers of identity of women at their inherited home and in society. They feel emotional security, physical security, and freedom at home and in society. However, when they cannot follow previous norms, they become distracted (p. 129). Women have different layers of identity at home and in society. After getting married, women think that they have individual security after becoming a mother and become respected at home and in society. When they become unable to give birth to any child, they have the problem of adjusting at home and in society. Sona Gupta is inflicted with the numerous taunts from her mother-in-law because she is unable to bear any child for the family and she relentlessly prays to Gods. She murmurs, "Please, I am growing old, bless us with a child, girl or boy, I do not care, but I cannot bear the emptiness in my heart" (p. 20). She tries to change her life giving birth to a baby in her growing age. She is forced to discontinue her thought about how she wants to live in the modern time but the psychological crisis does not allow her to adopt the new system in full-fledged. She attempts to be modern but she fails to do so because she remembers the bygone days. She is considered to be the contingent being but she is recognized by male members: by father's name and husband's name. Kapur has furthermore mentioned, "Sona's position forces her to bear these remarks in silence but her internal repartee is fired and pointed. How can I be a mother? Or make up for anything? If it is in my fate not to have children, it is in his not to have parents. I have to accept that as much as he" (pp. 25-26). By remembering her traditional value of woman in the family, she does not expose her internal fierceness to others but desires to be a mother anyhow to make father to her husband. She gives pressure to prove herself as a good wife, expectation of obedience, and pressure to have children. Therefore, Sona is a modern and educated woman but she follows earlier rules to adjust in the family.

People feel insecure in the transition period of traditional and modern society and they have a crisis in their identity by remembering the preceding behavior. Although they can solve all problems whichever comes in their life and take all responsibilities to manage everything. However, they feel insecure because they are affected by past history. When they are in the changing period, they have different problems because the traumatized person remembers

everything in detail of the past emotionally. At the very moment of being traumatized, the subject is stunned and their system is paralyzed. They cannot react to anything immediately but past experiences integrate into the memory and become distracted during their lives, as Vander Kolk and Vander Hart (1996) have explained, “May not easily fit into existing cognitive schemes and be remembered with particular vividness, or totally resist integration. Under extreme conditions, existing meaning schemes may be entirely unable to accommodate frightening experiences which causes the memory of these experiences to be stored differently” (p. 427). When people have traumatic feelings, they do not have a clear way to go forward. They want to manage present problems but they are under a frightening situation of previous behavior. By repressing traumatic memory, the traumatized subject evades recounting their traumatic experience relating to the painful feeling of anxiety and it guides them to depression and shame. Then, they show violent behavior when there is conflict in their mind. Although Nisha Gupta’s husband, Yaspal Gupta is an educated person, he always takes protective shadow and gains economic and social benefit from his parents. However, when the parents abandon him, he feels that he has been helpless. He cannot bear it and utters to Sona, “How could this happen to one so good, where is the justice in this world?” (p. 117). It means that he has a direct impact of antecedent time into the present hour. The contemporary situation is not an absolute thing but it is the result of the past. Yaspal does not take any responsibility of his wife, Nisha and she feels insecure at her home on one hand and on the other hand, she has to take all responsibilities of her brother’s marriage although she cannot manage everything properly, Kapur writes:

The forlorn misery that was Nisha’s burden increased with every step made in the direction of her brother’s marriage. Had her parents not been so determined to reject Suresh, she could have been reveling in attention as the groom’s only real sister, instead of feeling a source of apology and justification; she wished she could disappear into some hole till the wedding was over (p. 249).

Nisha’s parents do not take any responsibility for their son’s marriage ceremony and they do not attain it. Then, Nisha takes the leadership totally but she becomes unhappy because it is the reason that the parents should attain their children’ marriage ceremony according to the traditional behavior. When she remembers everything in details of the past experience, she becomes paralyzed. She cannot go forward easily because she has an unclear way in the present time. She wants to solve the current problem but she has a disputed mind. She has the frightening

position of the past convention and disappears till the wedding of her brother is over. She thinks that family reputation becomes more important than justice. Thus, Nisha feels insecure there and she leaves the wedding place because she is affected by the past traditional culture.

Women have problems coming out of home although they are advanced to solve the outside world because they are guided by conventional thought. They want to break the traditional social concept but they get affected by the previous practices of their family. The long established behavior is that men can only do outside business and women have to work inside of home. Therefore, when modern women take any new step of doing business, the traditional belief becomes an obstacle to them because they are guided by the past experiences. Traditional behaviors keep women in a narrow space because they are behaved as inferior, weak, and submission at home and in society and the old generation people do not want to change the conventional values. Urvashi Butalia brings the reference of a woman named Damyanti shagal and she further presents: "When I tried to persuade my father, he said, well if you feel scared you go. I said babuji, he said no bibi, if you feel scared you go. But where do I go? Then, I came to Lahore. I remember asking what should I do, where should I go, my father was refusing to go" (p. 115). It means that there is threatening and underestimation to women to do anything without support of men. Kapur explains that Nisha Gupta desires to go beyond the established thought and wishes to create her new life by doing business. Nisha's mother, Sona Gupta is not convinced with her daughter's goal and she rejects her plan nonetheless Nisha does not give any attention to what other people comment about her steps as the writer notes, "Nisha did not care what other people said or thought" (p. 289). She challenges the customary discrimination but she has the fear of the stereotyped behavior. When Nisha decides to do new business, Sona is not satisfied, as the author further writes, "Sona is not happy at this new development of Nisha's life because she is going to get married and questions why she desires to waste time and money in all this. A business is not like teaching and designable when the bride reaches to the door of the groom" (p. 289). Sona thinks that Nisha should not do the business instead of teaching because she is a woman on one hand and on the other hand, she is going to another's home after her marriage. She perceives that women are accepted to endure pain quietly. Therefore, Nisha who is a modern woman, gets obstacles from her mother while launching new business because of the conventional thought of her mother and she falls in the trouble of traditional notions.

The new generation people get suffering when they attempt to escape from the long established culture. When people want to subvert the conventional thought or they desire to live in the modern situation, the conventional norms do not allow them to adopt the new system in full-fledge easily. Butalia has explained that the old generation people do not want to change the conventional norms and values and women do not have special identity at home and in society because they are not “acceptable figure” in the nationalist discourse (p. 310). Traditional gender role casts man as rational, strong, protective, and decisive while it casts women as emotional, irrational, nurturing and submission. It interprets that women are weaker than men while doing work in the field and they cannot hold their business without men. Nisha Gupta determines to do the business for selling suits. It is her goal and takes supports of a master Ji who sews suits. However, he becomes careless in his duty because he works under of a woman. He actually lies down after lunch and always becomes unpleasant in his duty although he gets proper salary because he is working under of Nisha. Kapur writes, “Master Ji actually lies down after lunch. Is Nisha paying him to rest? Master Ji shows his displeasure by not coming for two whole days?” (P. 293). Nisha faces lots of difficulties in course of selling suits in her shop because of the unhelpful nature of master Ji. He thinks that men are expected to be strong and dominant. So, she cannot manage her business without him because she is a woman. She thinks that it is the conventional idea that men dominate women in the traditional society and they do not do any work under women. When modern women like to break the established social concept or they desire to do outside business, they suffer from the pastoral thought. Thus, Nisha gets suffering when she stands against the conventional thought.

Conclusion

Manju Kapur's *Home* presents the intertwined realities of identity crisis and cultural trauma within the rapidly changing Indian society. The novel illustrates that every individual often struggles to detach themselves from the cultural values and traditions that help them to shape their lives, even when they encounter modern ideas and opportunities. The characters get a continuous tension between tradition and modernity. It creates confusion and conflict in their lives. Similarly, the characters have crises when they attempt to negotiate personal aspirations within the constraints of family and social expectations. The novel also gives a clear viewpoint that women challenge gender discrimination but they frequently find security and social

acceptance within the patriarchal structures. In the same way, male characters also assert authority regardless of their educational, economic, and social status because they desire to maintain patriarchal values in their society. Thus, *Home* illustrates that cultural trauma is not only a memory of the past but it plays the role of active force which shapes present identities and social relations. Although the novel portrays gender, family, and cultural conflict, it underscores the complexities of transformation and the enduring impact of tradition on individual and collective identity.

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